

Green Neighborhoods

Like many communities throughout Massachusetts, Newbury faced a profound dilemma: how to accommodate its new residential development without sacrificing the natural and historic resources that make the community unique. With the assistance of the Green Neighborhoods Alliance the town adopted a new and powerful tool – the Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) bylaw. Simply put, OSRD is a site design technique that arranges the development on each parcel in a way that conserves 50% or more of the land as open space.

Open Space Residential Design is an effective tool that embodies four of the Office for Commonwealth Development's *Sustainable Development Principles*¹:

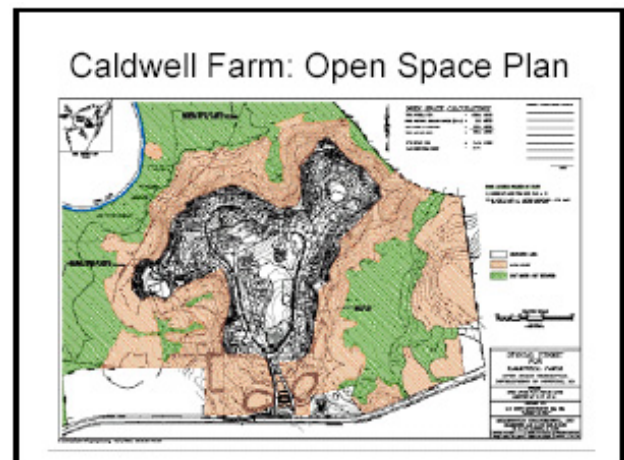
- Concentrate development
- Restore and enhance the environment
- Conserve natural resources
- Expand housing opportunities.

The Alliance, established by the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) and the Massachusetts Audubon Society, is comprised of a diverse spectrum of stakeholders including developers, realtors, engineers, conservation organizations, and regional and state agencies. It has been working to reshape development to minimize environmental impacts, maximize economic profits, and provide new housing opportunities by promoting innovative land-use and development bylaws, particularly Open Space Residential Design (OSRD). The Alliance engages in extensive outreach in order to explain, promote, and demonstrate the utility, cost-effectiveness and desirability of such sustainable development approaches. Alliance members work to create an effective, collaborative working relationship between historically adversarial groups, bringing these groups into the planning process before developers are committed to costly design plans while allowing public officials to encourage creativity and to streamline the development process. The result is a win-win for the developers and the community: critical environmental resources are protected, open space is preserved, community connections are maintained, property values increase and developers' profits are maximized.

OSRD bylaws can have a beneficial impact on both the development process and its results. By bringing the developer and the community together early in the process OSRD can both increase design flexibility and streamline the review process. OSRD can also reduce development and infrastructure costs by allowing for a more compact development pattern, designing with the landscape and preserving and enhancing environmental resources. By integrating conservation values into the planning process open space preservation is achieved while reducing the demand to acquire new municipal parkland, unique or

fragile habitats are protected, the pollution impacts of storm water runoff are reduced, aquifers are recharged, and there are more opportunities to link wildlife habitats. Density bonuses written into the bylaws can also increase the number of housing units, both affordable and market value, allowed in new developments.

The Town of Newbury was the first municipality in the Commonwealth to adopt OSRD bylaws. Newbury's OSRD bylaw protects 50% of the acreage at a proposed development as open space, while providing developers with a housing unit bonus for historic preservation, creation of affordable housing, or protection of additional open space.



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¹ http://www.mass.gov/ocd/docs/SdPrinciples_color.pdf



Caldwell Farms is a large housing project planned for a 125-acre site. As a result of OSRD, 100 of the 125 acres will be preserved as open space including fields, forest, freshwater and saltwater wetlands adjacent to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). If built based on by-right zoning the development would have produced 62 housing units. The Newbury OSRD bylaw provides for unit bonuses for additional open space and historic preservation; as a result the development will now yield 66 units. The developer also has agreed to put in a shared wastewater treatment system that will be more protective of the environment and take up less space than that required by minimum environmental standards. And as an added bonus to the community, the project will preserve the circa 1800 historic farmhouse currently located on the site.

The Open Space Residential Design concept has been integrated into twenty-four communities throughout Massachusetts. In addition to Newbury, the towns of Dalton, Dudley, Gloucester, Groveland, Ipswich, Lenox, Rowley, Sharon, Uxbridge, West Newbury, and Wilmington have adopted or begun implementation of the model OSRD bylaw. Eleven (11) other communities, including Amesbury, Amherst, Foxborough, Grafton, Groton, Hopkinton, Lexington, Lincoln, Westborough, Westford and Westwood, have incorporated concepts from the model OSRD bylaws into their existing bylaws.

